



Judge Wendy Sue Strathdee

On Tuesday, 22 May 2018 Wendy Strathdee was sworn-in as a judge of the District Court and the Dust Diseases Tribunal of New South Wales. Elizabeth Cheeseman SC attended the ceremonial sitting and spoke on behalf of the New South Wales Bar. Also in attendance were her Honour's parents, Ian Strathdee QC and Dr Marleen Strathdee.

Her Honour's mother, an ophthalmic surgeon, was a pioneer at a time when being a working mother was not the norm. By all accounts, her Honour's childhood was spent in a household which knew the meaning of hard work, and which valued intellectual achievement and prized the importance of the public service. Her Honour's husband Mr Dominic Priestly SC and her two children were also present to witness this significant day in her Honour's professional life.

Judge Strathdee entered the legal profession in 1988. She was the associate to Judge Conomos and then for some years for Judge Phil Johnston on the District Court. Her Honour was admitted to the New South Wales Bar in 1992. By that time, her Honour was an expert in law and the lore of the court room and the many aspects of a life at the Bar. However, even that did not spare her Honour from a proper period of initiation even appearing before Judge Johnston. Her Honour's pupil master was Peter Mooney SC. Her Honour moved from Garfield Barwick Chambers to Elizabeth Street Chambers over the course of her career at the Bar.

As a barrister her Honour was admired for her friendly pragmatism in cases, her firm but generous nature and her good heartedness in dealing with others in the court. These are significant aspects observed of her Honour in how a barrister practises the Law. Her professional domain was the Dust Diseases Tribunal and Mr John O'Mealey AM (who was also in court) formally remembered her as a regular and skilful advocate before that tribunal.

Her Honour is remembered for dealing with real issues in a case before the court and was held in high regard by her opposition and judges of that court. As is well known, the tribunal sits at any day, any time almost anywhere. The development of the Tribunals

practice and procedure and polices are in no small measure due to her and her regular appearance as top counsel in that jurisdiction. She has even been a pioneer sitting as a mediator in this niche area of Dust Diseases. Throughout her Honour's career, and especially during these mediations, her Honour exhibited excellence and extensive knowledge of the area. Her Honour's achievement and accomplishment in this area often draws remarks upon the warmth and sensitivity she exhibited to all concerned in the Dust Diseases procedures. Litigants bore witness to a highly skilled advocate in the most trying of circumstances. Those considerable skills will make her Honour a compassionate judge who will bring significant measures of legal skill and compassion to the court.

Judge Strathdee replaces his Honour Judge Kearns on the District Court.

By **Kevin Tang**



Debra Maher

Debra Maher was sworn-in as a magistrate of the Children's Court of NSW on 18 June 2018. President Arthur Moses SC spoke on behalf of the NSW Bar.

Present at the ceremony were her Honour's family and friends, in particular her husband, former rugby player turned referee, Wayne Erickson, daughter Whitney, an accomplished opera singer, and granddaughters Lilly and Allegra.

Her Honour is described by former colleagues at Legal Aid as 'feisty, committed, passionate and caring'. She attended Burwood Girls High School and enrolled in a Bachelor of Science degree at the University of Sydney. Her Honour decided to change career path and instead went to work for IBM Australia as a business analyst. Her Honour then heard the call of the law and began work as a paralegal at Baker & McKenzie Solicitors.

In 1994 her Honour completed a Bachelor of Legal Studies at Macquarie University and following her practical legal training she was admitted as a solicitor of the Supreme Court of NSW in February 1995. Her Honour began working as a legal research officer for the Royal Commission into the NSW Police

Service, before accepting a position at Hunt Partners from December 1996 to September 1997.

For the next five years her Honour was a solicitor and then senior solicitor at the NSW Office of the DPP, managing many and varied tasks, from Local Court committals, Supreme Court bail lists, conferences with witnesses and victims of crime, as well as appearing as an advocate in District Court short matters.

Since January 2003, until the time her Honour accepted the appointment, she had served in various capacities at Legal Aid NSW – as solicitor in charge at the Drug Court of NSW, acting solicitor in charge of Inner City Local Courts and indictable offences in Paramatta.

Her Honour has presented and co-written numerous, authoritative conference papers regarding this court, criminal law, the Bail Act, sentencing, and the criminalisation of children in care. She has made a number of submissions on behalf of Legal Aid NSW to inquiries by Law Reform Commissions and parliamentary committees.

Established in 1905 under the Neglected Children and Juvenile Offenders Act, the Children's Court of NSW is the second oldest such court in the world. The court combines the two distinct but complementary jurisdictions of juvenile justice and care and protection.

In his concluding remarks, Arthur Moses SC said:

I needn't remind those present today that juvenile offending is often the subject of sensationalist reports and commenting in some sections of the media – we are told that children are out of control and need a firm hand. What is true is that young offenders are more likely to suffer socio-economic disadvantage and interrupted schooling. Other common factors include family violence, parental unemployment, child abuse, neglect, physical, intellectual or learning disabilities.

[T]he juvenile system is only as good as the magistrates appointed to this court and the lawyers appearing before this court. It is for that reason that the people of NSW are fortunate that the attorney has appointed a magistrate with vast experience in criminal law and steeped in both the practices and the unique pressures of this court.

The whole community has a stake in your success, not to mention the success of this court, in helping some of society's most disadvantage and troubled youths to make a successful transformation into responsible citizens. I congratulate you and wish you well.

By **Kevin Tang**